



Western Renewable Energy Zones Project Update - November 2008

This update provides interested parties and individuals with a summary of the current status of the Western Governors' Association and U.S. Department of Energy's Western Renewable Energy Zones project. Links to more detailed information are listed at the end of this update.

WREZ Background

The central goal of the WREZ project, which was launched in May 2008, is to identify those areas in the West with high quality, developable renewable resources in order to expedite the development and delivery of electricity generated by renewable energy. Participating in the project are 11 states, two Canadian provinces, and areas in Mexico that are part of the [Western Interconnection](#). The WREZ project will generate the following:

Phase I: Reliable information for use by resource planners and decision-makers that supports the cost-effective and environmentally sensitive development of renewable energy in specified zones, as well as renewables not suitable for aggregation into zones.

Phase II: Conceptual transmission plans for delivering that energy to load centers across the Western Interconnection. A number of factors will be considered, including the potential for development, timeframes, common transmission needs and costs.

Phase III: Coordinated resource procurement agreements to support commercial transmission projects and a regional market for renewables. Public utility commissions, load serving entities, and generators will be brought together to develop mechanisms for coordinating both the timing and regulatory approval of procurement agreements.

Phase IV: Build interstate cooperation to facilitate transmission facility approvals, allocate costs and ensure cost recovery. REZs and the transmission needed to access them will likely cross state lines, requiring approvals from multiple states.

Guiding this work during the four phases is the WREZ Steering Committee comprising governors, public utility commissioners and Canadian premiers. Officials from the Departments of Energy, Interior and Agriculture, as well as the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, serve as ex officio members.

Working Groups

Since the start of the WREZ process, three working groups have been meeting to reach agreement on an approach for identifying Renewable Energy Zones.

- [Environment and Lands Working Group](#) (E&L) is working to categorize the development potential of REZs based on environmental, land use and wildlife criteria. They will coordinate their efforts with the Western Governors' newly formed Wildlife Habitat Council.
- [Zone Identification and Technical Analysis Working Group](#) (ZITA) is identifying areas throughout the Western Interconnection with high concentrations of one or more renewable energy resources and incorporating land, natural resource, and wildlife data from the E&L Work Group to gauge the developability of the potential REZs.
- [Generation and Transmission Modeling Working Group](#) (GTM) will develop a flexible and user-friendly model to evaluate the delivered price of power coming from REZs to load centers and will engage transmission planners to study the transmission needed to move that power.

WREZ Technical Committee Meeting

All three of the work groups report to the WREZ Technical Committee. The Technical Committee was appointed by the Steering Committee to represent them and stakeholder interests and to integrate and review the efforts of the working groups. The Technical Committee held a public meeting in Denver on October 13-14 and took a number of actions. The Committee approved the following:

- ZITA's assessment of the resource potential for wind, solar and geothermal in the Western Interconnection and within the Candidate Study Areas for those locations with the greatest resources. Those biomass and hydropower resources that are located within a CSA will be included in the ongoing analysis. However, certain Canadian hydropower resources may warrant a REZ designation absent other renewable energy sources. The approved CSA map is available for review at the Web site listed below.
- A process for refining the Candidate Study Areas. ZITA will identify the high quality renewables in a CSA based on a number of factors, including the density of the resource, the strength of the wind and solar resource and the likelihood of attracting interstate investment. Additional refinements will occur based on environmental sensitivity, excluded areas, wildlife assessments and technology assumptions.
- A methodology for developing supply curves for each of the proposed REZs. Direction for development of the transmission model was also provided.

Key Dates and Events

October 2008 - April 2009 - ZITA and E&L work groups continue to refine recommendations.

January 13-14, 2009 - Public Technical Committee meeting in Denver to review proposed REZs, transmission study proposal and scope of work for Phase III.

January 2009 - Steering Committee considers Technical Committee recommendations and make them available for public comment.

February 2009 - Public comments sought on proposed REZs with exclusion zones, assumptions for the development of cost curves to calculate renewable energy generation costs, transmission model inputs, and criteria to be used to identify sensitive wildlife habitats.

April 2009 - Technical Committee sends to the Steering Committee recommendations for final REZs, a transmission model and next steps for Phases two and four.

April/May 2009 - Steering Committee acts on the Technical Committee's recommendations.

June 14-16, 2009 – Governors and premiers presented with the Phase 1 report, which includes renewable energy zone identification and mapping. Work on procedures for collaboration on procurement of generation from REZs gets underway as part of Phase III. Phase IV objectives are identified.

Fall 2009 – Phase II conceptual transmission planning report completed.

Helpful Links

Summary report from the October 2008 [Technical Committee Meeting](#)

WGA WREZ Home Page <http://www.westgov.org/wga/initiatives/wrez/index.htm>

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